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The 1999 Leadership and Management Conference

Managing Oneself by Peter F. Drucker

**Excerpts from Drucker Foundation Leadership and Management Conference
Redefining Leadership, Organizations, and Communities
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In a few hundred years, when the history of our time will be written from a long term perspective, I think it is very probable that the most important event these historians will see is not technology, it is not the Internet, it is not e-commerce. It is an unprecedented change in the human condition. For the first time -- and I mean that literally -- for the first time, substantial and rapidly growing numbers of people have choices. For the first time, they will have to *manage themselves*. And let me say, we are totally unprepared for it.



Throughout history, practically nobody had any choice. Up until maybe 1900, even in the most highly developed countries, the overwhelming majority followed their father -- if they were lucky. There was only downward mobility; there was no upward mobility. If your father was a peasant farmer any place, you were a peasant farmer. If he was a craftsman, you were a craftsman, and so on.



Opportunities of Choice

AND now suddenly a very large -- still a minority, but it's growing -- [number] of people have choices. And what is more, they will have more than one career. The working life span of people is now close to sixty years. You got twenty years in 1900.

In a very short time, we will no longer believe that retirement means the end of working life. Retirement may be even earlier than it has been, but working life will continue if only out of economic necessity. It is predictable that within the next twenty-five years most people will still keep on working, perhaps not full-time, not as employees of a company -- as temps, as part-timers, but still working till they are in their seventies -- in part, maybe for economic reasons. I hope that my grandchildren will not be foolish enough to be willing to give thirty-five percent of their income to support older people who are perfectly capable of working. Very few people will be able, no matter how much they put into their retirement accounts, to live without some additional income.

But also, knowledge gives choice. And when I talk to the people in my executive management program, (who are forty-five years-old on average, and successful people, sixty percent business, forty percent non-business), every one says, "I do not expect to end my career where I am working now."

If your father was a lawyer, you were a lawyer, or maybe a doctor, but a professional, and so on. And you were born into maybe not the profession, maybe not the work, but certainly the class in which you spent your life. And that is no longer true of knowledge.

This also explains why we suddenly have women in the same jobs as men. Historically, men and women have always had an equal participation in the labor force. The idea of the idle housewife is a 19th-century delusion, but men and women did different jobs. There's no civilization in which the two genders did the same work. And knowledge work knows no gender. This is one of the great changes -- that in knowledge work, men and women do the same work. This is also unprecedented, and also a major change in the human condition.



Responsibilities of Choice